PETER O'TOOLE



British film star Peter O'Toole celebrated his forty-fourth birthday in make-up portraying a 77-year-old Roman emperor. It was the first day of filming *Caligula* in which he plays the debauched and tyrannical Emperor Tiberius.

O'Toole, who has been nominated for five Academy Awards, often disguises himself in eccentric character roles. He was an elderly schoolmaster in the musical *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, the Christ-like figure in *The Ruling Class*, and the septuagenarian Don Quixote in *The Man of La Mancha*. "I'm through playing character roles," O'Toole said after playing Quixote. "I want to return to the stage where I feel I can use my resources more as an actor." However, for *Caligula*, he arrived in Rome with an ancient's make-up, depicting the character as authentically as his own painstaking research could bring to it. What changed the actor's mind was that he had been offered the role of the most powerful man in First Century Rome – a man full of guile and cunning and charm one moment and barbarously cruel the next.

At a birthday party hosted by Franco Rossellini, the film's co-producer, O'Toole was asked how old he was. "Old enough to understand the mentality of 77-year-old Tiberius," he quipped, "and on a hot Roman summer day like this, old enough to feel and maybe even look like him." For the role, O'Toole's lean, handsome features were completely obscured by white hair, face sores and age wrinkles; only the mesmeric ice-blue eyes remained.

O'Toole was born in County Galway, Ireland, on August 2, 1932. After somewhat rebellious school years, he was recruited into the Royal Navy. O'Toole wanted to act on the stage and saw plays whenever possible. Once he hitchhiked to London to see *Guys and Dolls*, traveling via Stratford to catch *King Lear*. After his discharge from the Navy, he won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. While studying there, he saw Wilfrid Lawson in Strindberg's *The Father*. O'Toole says, "I credit Lawson with having taught me more about acting than any other actor, instructor or experience."

His first professional engagement was with the Bristol Old Vic, and during three-and-a-half years he acted no less than 53 roles. It was in the play *The Long*

and the Short and the Tall that O'Toole showed his stature, and in 1959 he was named Actor of the Year. That year, too, he made his film debut, a small part in *Kidnapped*. His mind still on the theater, he accepted an engagement at Stratford during which he alternated the roles of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew* and Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida*.

In 1960, David Lean cast O'Toole in the title role of *Lawrence of Arabia*. The rest is history. In his next film, *Becket* (1964), he portrayed a headstrong, young Henry II to Richard Burton's Archbishop of Canterbury. By now, O'Toole's rave reviews established him as an international star of stage and screen. He then played the title role in *Lord Jim* (1965), followed by far-ranging roles in *The Bible* (1966), *Night of the Generals* (1967), *What's New, Pussycat?* (1965), *How to Steal a Million* (1966) and *The Lion in Winter* (1968), in which he again portrayed Henry II, in his later years.

At the special request of Sir Laurence Olivier, he inaugurated Britain's National Theatre Company in the role of Hamlet at the Old Vic. He directed Beckett's *Happy Days*, and he and Siobhan McKenna brought two scenes of *Juno and the Paycock* to New York's Carnegie Hall to represent Ireland during the bicentennial celebrations.

O'Toole's considerable and impressive achievements following *Caligula* include diverse roles in Richard Rush's *The Stunt Man* (1980), TV's *Masada* (1981), *My Favorite Year* (1982), *Supergirl* (1984), *Creator* (1985), Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* (1987), Neil Jordan's *High Spirits* (1988), Alejandro Jodorowsky's *The Rainbow Thief* (1990), *FairyTale: A True Story* (1997), *Phantoms* (1998), *Bright Young Things* (2003), Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* (2004), *Venus* (2006) and the voice of the snooty food critic in Disney-Pixar's *Ratatouille* (2007).